

ESL Students feedback on the use of blogs for language learning

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Abstract

The proliferation of the information and communication technology has provided university educators and e-learning practitioners with the technological tools that can be implemented as pedagogical instruments in the classrooms. This paper provides an account of how the blog was integrated as a pedagogical tool in the ESL classrooms and reports on the students' feedback and perception on the use of this social medium to enhance their L2 learning. Data was collected via a survey questionnaire involving a selected cohort of low proficiency ESL students at tertiary level. Using the proposed framework, the students carried out several stages of the blogging activities embedded in the English for Social Sciences Course that they were taking at the end of which the questionnaire was administered. Analysis of data in the main indicated positive responses from the students regarding the use of blogs in L2 their learning activities. They perceived that the use of blog had generally enhanced their L2 skills such as reading and writing, developed their self-confidence, improved their communication skills and reduced their anxiety when learning and using the language among their peers. The paper ends by highlighting the benefits that can be gained as a result of the implementation of the weblog in language learning classrooms.

Keyword: Virtual Learning, blogs, ESL, language learning, e-learning

Introduction

Currently, attention in the ESL/EFL classrooms has shifted from teacher-centered to student-centered learning with many educators and instructors showing increasing concern on how their students learn rather than their methods of teaching (Pinkman, 2005). Along with this shift,

language educators and instructors have employed various resources to equip their learners with the knowledge and skills that can make them more autonomous and independent in their learning. It is believed that learners can get the most out of the learning environment if they can take responsibility for their own learning both inside and outside the classrooms. The current advancements in the information and communication technology (ICT) have thus provided the learners with various tools in the form of computer-based or Internet-based resources to help them take charge of their own learning. Presently, many social network services (SNS) such as Facebook, MySpace and Twitter have become the craze among the Netizens worldwide. With respect to the use of this social media in the teaching and learning environment, the weblog or popularly known as ‘blog’ has become progressively popular as an authentic and constructive learning tool especially in the language classrooms (Seitzinger, 2006).

Blog-Assisted Language Learning

Blog which is also known as online journal or web diary is an Internet-based resource which was initially used by bloggers (blog writers) as personal journals or diaries. Currently however, blogs are being used to express and share thoughts, ideas and information with the wider public. Blogs are user-friendly websites which are easy to maintain and frequently updated by their owners. As a social networking and medium for communication, blogs enabled the users to interact not only with the computer, but also with other bloggers. Lately, blog is gradually being used as a pedagogical tool in the classrooms and it is deemed to assume “a more communicative role than the less interactive CALL applications” (Pinkman, 2005, p.14). Through its newly-found status as an educational tool, blogging allows the learners to “reflect on their perceptions of the learning materials and on their own learning process” (Seitzinger, 2006, p.6). Further, as broadly

put by McLeod (2001), blogs “help students explore and assimilate new ideas, create links between the familiar and unfamiliar, mull over possibilities, and explain things to the self before explaining them to others” (p. 152).

Previous studies have attested to the valuable role played by blogs in enhancing students’ language learning skills. In a study on the use of blogging as a platform for ESL learning (Nadzrah Abu Bakar, 2009), the findings indicated that various levels of learning activities took place as a result of the use of blogs whereby the students were encouraged to communicate and interact with their peers using different language patterns. In relation to L2 writing, a study which examined the usefulness of blogs in developing students’ writing in ESL context (Nadzrah Abu Bakar & Kemboja Ismail, 2009), has indicated that the students perceived blogging as an interesting and motivating learning device that had helped them to effectively interact with their peers and expanded their critical thinking ability. More importantly, they also perceived that blogging had aided them to develop their L2 writing constructively. In another study by Ward (2004) which examined the effectiveness of using blog in the reading and writing classroom has discovered that the use of blogs had received positive responses from the students. They perceived that using blogs not only had raised their interest in the L2 reading and writing classroom, but also facilitated their language learning process.

The use of blogs in language classroom has also been found to be valuable in promoting collaborative knowledge-building activities among learners. As an online journal, blog allows the learners to participate actively in their own learning, determine their learning goals, and share their knowledge or in order to develop their own understanding of the target learning activities. A study by Yih-Rueh (2006) has examined the effectiveness of a blog-based learning tool, called *Learning Blogs* (p.280) whereby the students and the class teacher blogged on the warm-up

activities and review of the lessons. On the part of the students, it was generally concluded from the findings that blogging had promoted interactive discussion among them and eased their collective understanding of the target learning activities. On the part of the teacher, responding to the students' warm-up blogs activities had assisted her to regulate the content of the lessons and thus effectively guide the classroom activities. In short, the findings of the studies highlighted provide strong indication that as an online forum, blogs can be used as a novel and effective strategy not only to enhance knowledge-building activities among learners in general, but also language learning activities in particular.

Though there are already existing studies and reviews on the use of blogs as an educational tool (Nadzrah Abu Bakar, 2009; Nadzrah Abu Bakar & Kemboja Ismail, 2009; Seitzinger, 2006; Pinkman, 2005; Ward, 2004; Yih-Rueh, 2006), further studies still need to be done especially with respect to the use of blogs in the second or foreign language learning classroom. This is because as a computer-based resource, the use of blogs as a teaching and learning tool is relatively new and it has only of late been gaining popularity (Pinkman, 2005). Furthermore, studies on the use of blogs in the second or foreign language classrooms are still lacking especially the ones which involved ESL low proficiency learners. Thus, the present study was initiated as an action research in which the weblog or blog was incorporated as part of the evaluation for the SKPD 1033 English for Social Sciences course. This course is offered to the undergraduates of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM). The overarching aims of this action research were to examine the effectiveness of the use of blogging for low proficiency ESL students in enhancing their language learning activities, to determine how blogs improve their reading, writing, critical thinking and discussion

skills, and to investigate how blogs improve the students' command of the language with respect to grammar, vocabulary and sentence structure.

This action research had adopted the social constructivism perspective as a theoretical framework for investigating the learning language activities via blogging. The section that follows elaborates on the fundamental aspects of the social constructivist theory and its connectivity in language learning.

Social Constructivism and Language Learning

Social constructivism has had an impact on education both in terms of pedagogy and curriculum design (Jones & Brader-Araje, 2002). Social constructivism as a theory was developed from the work of Vygotsky (1978), which emphasises the role of social interaction in the development of cognition. It also underscores the significant roles played by the social context and social interactions in meaning-making activities (Galloway, 2001).

As a philosophy of learning, social constructivism accentuates that learning occurs when knowledge is actively constructed through the students' participation in discussion and related activities instead of the students receiving their knowledge passively from teachers (Brooks & Brooks, 1993; Ibrahim, Silong, & Samah, 2001; Kerka, 1997). In other words, learning occurs when the learners construct their own understanding of a concept. This understanding results from students actively searching for meanings and making sense of what they know and have understood (meaning-making) and not totally memorizing facts from their reading or from what they were told without critically analysing this information (Von Glaserfeld, 1984 in Tam, 2000).

From a social constructivist perspective, the construction of knowledge is not merely isolated and wholly internal but rather, knowledge is constructed in a social context through

interactions with others. It can be said that in social constructivism learning is an active process and meaningful learning takes place only when learners are involved in social activities. Staarman, Laat and Meijden (2002) stress that new knowledge is connected to the real life of the learners and learning is supported by the construction of past experiences. Learning that happens is the effect of construction and re-construction of the students' internal understanding of meaning. For students, in language classrooms, meaning-making involves more than knowing the meaning of words and combining them in the right sentence structures. Students construct their understanding of the subject, for example from the reading materials, and based on the knowledge that they bring to class they then develop the knowledge in the classroom.

The use of blog in the classroom can be said to embrace the philosophy of social constructivism whereby the learners acquire new knowledge of the subject matter through discussions, and further expand this newly-acquired knowledge by applying it in different situations. These processes allow the learners to become active participants in developing their own understanding of important concepts and achieve their learning goals (Peters, Cornu, & Collins, 2003). Social constructivists also emphasize that the most important part of learning involves the learners having the confidence in their language ability and being able to use the language to express themselves, to explain, to negotiate and to compromise with peers during the learning activities.

Methodology

The primary objective of this action research was to examine the effectiveness of integrating the use of blogs in the ESL classrooms which involved low proficiency students. It aimed to probe the effectiveness of using blogs in improving the students' abilities in important areas such as

reading, writing, critical thinking and discussion skills. Additionally, it sought to investigate the students' feedback on whether the use of blogs could enhance their command of the language with respect to grammar, vocabulary and sentence structure.

Context of the Study

The English for Social Sciences Course (SKPD1033) is a compulsory course to be taken by the undergraduates in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, UKM. The course runs for four hours per week over a period of 14 weeks in a semester. Its main objective is to equip the undergraduates with relevant ESL skills such as reading, writing and speaking which will enable them to cope with the academic demands while at the university. This course comprises three main evaluation components: Integrated Project (45%), Quiz (15%) and Final Examination (40%).

For the purpose of the action research, the researchers only focused on the use of blogs in the Integrated Project (hereafter known as IP) component. The IP consists of three sub-components of evaluations i.e., the blogs discussion (10%), the oral presentation (15%) and the written project report (20%). The IP requires the students to collaborate in a group of four or five members. The students are given the freedom to choose their own group members. Each group then selects a suitable topic or issue related to social sciences or humanities, determines the objectives of the project and formulate research questions. Each group member is to conduct online and off line research activity based on the selected issue. For this purpose, they will have to create a group blog; an avenue for group members to carry out online written discussion. In their respective group blogs, they will carry out discussion, share ideas and information, pose

opinions and views on the issue and the research questions posted. This online written discussion is carried out until week 12 of the semester.

The group oral presentation is conducted in Week 13 and 14 of the semester. For the oral presentation, each IP group presents the findings of their research based on the research questions and discussion done in their blogs. Each group will decide on the division of work among its team members and each individual member will present a section of the project work. To this end, each group is required to use visual aids to support their presentation within the duration of 20 minutes.

The third component of the IP is a written report produced by each IP group which elaborates on the research objectives, research questions, the findings, recommendations and/or suggestions on the issue raised. The hard-copy of the written discussion of each group conducted via the blog is attached to the written report.

Participants

This study was conducted during the Semester 1, 2009/2010 academic session. A total of 197 students were registered for the course and they were grouped based on their Malaysia University English Test (MUET) bands. The MUET is a national examination used to measure the students' English language proficiency level. It is a compulsory exam to take for school leavers who aspires to pursue their studies at tertiary level in Malaysia. The MUET bands employed to grade the students' English language proficiency level ranged from Band 1 to Band 6 with the Band 1 student considered as 'Extremely limited user' and Band 6 as 'Very good user' of the language.

In the present study there were two major categories of students: The first consisted of students who obtained MUET bands 1 and 2 (extremely limited to limited users of the language) and the second was for students with MUET bands 3 and 4 (average to competent users of the language). On the whole, there were seven classes of 95 students with MUET band 1 and 2, and 12 classes of students with band 3 and 4 with a total of 102 students in this category. The participants selected for this study were the 95 students of MUET Bands 1 and 2 who enrolled in this course for Semester 1, 2009/2010 session. The selected students were mostly in their 2nd year of study in the various programs offered at the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities comprising 76 females and 19 males aged between 20-34 years old.

Instrument

A survey questionnaire was designed for the purpose of this study and it was pilot-tested on a group of students to check its validity and reliability. Improvement on the piloted questionnaire items were then made based on the students' feedback. The final version of the questionnaire had two major parts (see Figure 1). The first consisted of 11 items which sought the students' background information. The second comprised of seven main sections labeled alphabetically from Sections A-G, the details of which are as follow: Section A examined the students' perception towards using blogs in general (11 items); Section B required the students to state their opinion on the effects of using blog on their writing skills (2 items with 6 sub-items); Section C probed on the students' perception on how blogging can improve their reading skills (7 items); Section D examined the effects of blogging on their grammar and vocabulary learning (9 items); Section E looked at the extent to which blogging has improved their discussion skills in English (12 items); Section F observed the students' opinion on blogging and the

improvement in their critical thinking skills (6 items); and Section G surveyed their overall perceptions on the improvements in their various language skills highlighted.

PART A	Students' background information: 11 items. E.g., age, program of study
PART B:	
Section A	Blogging in general: 11 items. E.g., 'I like blogging.'
Section B	Blogging and writing: 2 items with 6 sub-items in question 2. E.g., 'I learn to write better in English.'
Section C	Blogging and reading: 7 items. E.g., 'I learn how to select information from my readings for the blog discussion.'
Section D	Blogging, grammar and vocabulary: 9 items. E.g., 'I generally feel that my English grammar has somewhat improved.'
Section E	Blogging and discussion: 12 items. E.g., 'I learn how to give opinions in the blog discussion.'
Section F	Blogging and critical thinking: 6 items. E.g., 'I think critically on the topic discussed before I post my comments/ideas.'
Section G	Overall: 1 item with 6 sub-items. The questions focused on the students' overall perceptions about their improvement in all the language skills highlighted.

Figure 1. Survey questionnaire structure

The questionnaire employed a 1-4 point Likert Scale with 1 being 'Strongly Disagree' and 4 being 'Strongly Agree'. The questionnaire was administered during class in week 12 of the semester (the students would have already completed the group blog discussion for the IP). The responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics in the form of frequency analysis and percentages and the results were then tabulated.

Procedure of the Implementation of the Blog

The IP consisted of written discussion on blogs, oral presentation and written report. Although the weightage of the blog discussion was only 10%, it played an important role towards the completion of the entire IP since both the oral presentation and the written report to a great extent were based on the blogs discussion. The use of blogs in this course was identified as learners' blogs where the learners had full control of discussion activities in their own blogs. The lecturers meanwhile acted as advisors and moderated the blogs discussion and the progress of the entire IP. From time to time they would provide feedback on the content of blogs discussion but would refrain from correcting the students' language use in order not to de-motivate them since they were low proficiency ESL learners. In other words, there was no language teaching on the blog.

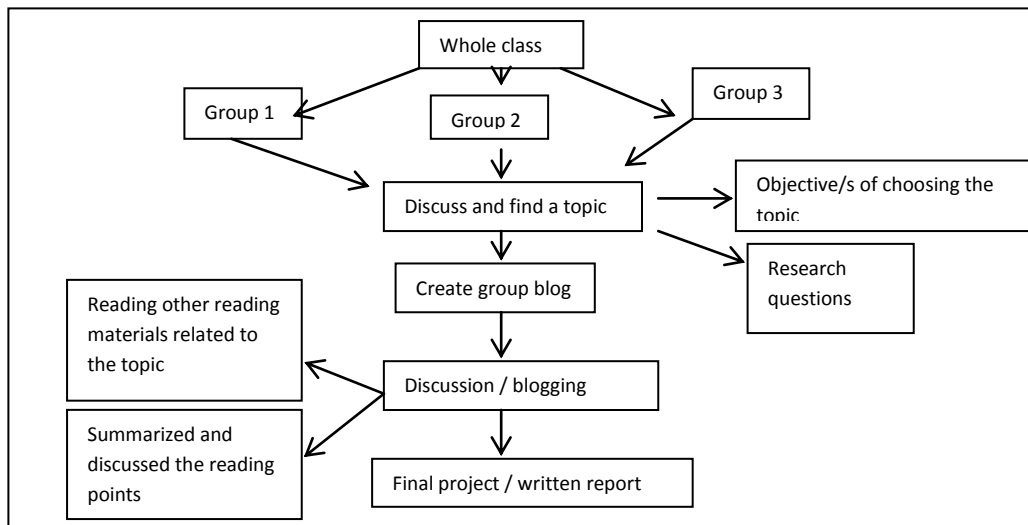


Figure 2: Framework of blogs activities

The blogs activities implemented in the present study had adapted the framework of blog projects proposed by Nadzrah Abu Bakar (2009, p. 597). The procedures of the blogging activities were as follows:

Stage 1: Division of groups

In order to complete the IP, the students worked in small groups of between 3-5 students per group depending on the size of each class. They then brainstormed on the issues or topics for their IP, the objective/s, and the research questions related to the selected topic. This meant that each group had different topic and research objectives from the rest. The selection of a specific topic was to allow the students to be focused when blogging. This stage is known as creating problem stage (Nadzrah Abu Bakar, 2009). Below is an excerpt from the students' IP objectives taken from Set 1 Group 2 (in the students' own words):

Topic: Dream

Research Objective:

- 1. To find what exactly the meaning of dream and why it is so mysterious.*
- 2. To find if dream is different based on people or situation.*
- 3. To find the differences of the definition of dream based on culture, country, ethnic group perspectives.*
- 4. To find if the dream can affect people in real life or not.*

The research objectives were later formulated into questions and used as guidelines for their blogs discussion.

Stage 2: Creating a Blog

Once the students had completed the task in Stage 1, they had to register their blog. The registration was done by the students themselves where each member had a password and user name to participate in their own group discussion. Students were allowed to be creative in

decorating their blogs. The lecturer concerned would record the URL of each group's blog since she/he would need to access and monitor the students' blogs discussions.

Stage 3: Discussion on Blog

In this stage, the students had to accomplish several tasks as a team. They needed to introduce themselves to each other in their own group and discuss the selected topic by posting the information, ideas, arguments, and opinions related to the topic. During this stage, they would apply the language that they had learned in the class constructively and actively. However, before they were able to participate in the blog discussion, they were required to search for information and read several articles relevant to the topic as basis for their discussion.

RESULTS

This section discusses the result of the study by examining the students' questionnaire responses (N=197). The discussion will highlight the most significant findings in the second part of the questionnaire especially in Sections A-F, as they appeared in the questionnaire. To ease the discussion in this section, the alphabet and number in the parenthesis such as (A1) will be used to refer to the questionnaire items in the relevant sections.

A. Students' Responses toward Blogging in General

The items in Section A required the students to indicate their perceptions towards using blog as part of their language learning activities in general. The questions were divided into different categories such as 'attitude' of using blogs and the 'effects' of using blogs. Majority of the students (see Table 1) indicated a positive attitude towards using blogs in their learning activities

whereby 90.5% of them chose “Strongly agree” and “Agree” to the statement such as “I like blogging” (A1) and 69.5% of them had chosen “Strongly Agree” and “Agree” to the statement “I like blogging in English” (A7).

Items A10, A8, A3 focus on the effect of blogging to the students learning English. The results suggested that the students indicated positive effect of using blogs where most of them (95.8%) had responded “Strongly Agree” and “Agree” to item A10 (Blogging promotes collaborative learning), and 85.2% to item A8 (...blogging has built up my self-confidence...). Additionally, 90.3% of them also agreed that blog was a useful learning tool. Almost ninety percent (85.9%) also strongly agreed that they were not worried what their friends thought of the language that they had used when blogging (A9).

Table 1: Students’ responses toward blogging in general

SECTION A		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	I like blogging.	12.6	77.9	7.4	1.1
3	I feel that blogging is a useful tool for learning English.	23.5	66.8	9.7	-
6	I am more confident communicating in English through blogging than face-to-face communication.	22.1	60.0	14.7	2.1
7	I like blogging in English.	9.5	60.0	27.4	2.1
8	I think blogging has built up my self-confidence in using the English language.	26.3	58.9	12.6	1.1
9	I don’t have to worry of what my friends would think of my language when I blog in English	24.2	61.7	13.7	0
10	Blogging promotes collaborative learning.	25.3	70.5	3.2	0

B. Students' Responses toward Blogging and Writing

Section B of the questionnaire examined the students' perceptions towards using blogs as a platform for writing in order to develop their writing skills in English (see Table 2). A high percentage of the students (92.6%) responded to "Strongly Agree" and "Agree" to using blog as a platform to practise writing in English (B1). The second item in Section B sought the students' opinion on the reasons why they thought blog could be useful to practise writing in English. Almost all (93.7 %) concurred strongly to the statements that they learnt to write better in English via blogs (B2a), expressed their ideas freely (90.5 % , B2b) and 89.3% strongly agreed that they were more creative in expressing their ideas (B2c). They also strongly agreed to items B2d (91.6%) and B2e (79.0%) that indicated the benefits the advantages of blogging in practicing their L2 writing skills.

Table 2: Students' Responses toward Blogging and Writing

SECTION B	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree
1 I think it is a good idea to use blogs to practice writing skills in English.	40.0	52.6	6.4
2 Blogging is useful to practice writing skills in English because			
a) I learn to write better in English.	24.2	69.5	5.3
b) I can express my ideas freely.	28.4	62.1	8.8
c) I can be more creative in expressing my ideas.	31.6	56.8	10.5
d) I am more confident with my writing ability.	22.1	69.5	7.4
e) I can write longer in English.	13.7	65.3	20.0

C. Students' Responses toward Blogging and Reading

The data in Section C (see Table 3) similarly revealed that the students thought positively about the connection between blogging and their reading skills in English. Majority (91.5%) indicated that they were encouraged to read more materials written in English since they had to support their viewpoints when posting in the blogs. Consequently this had helped them to become better readers whereby 93.7% of them concurred that they had learnt how to select information from their readings for the blogs discussion (C7) whilst 90.5% of them agreed strongly that their reading skills have improved (C6). The students (95.8%) also consented that they read related articles to support their points in the blogs discussion (C2). Apart from that, 97.9% agreed that they got more information when reading their friends' posting and 96.8% opined that reading their friends' comments had made them think critically about the issues arising (C4).

Table 3: Students' responses toward blogging and reading

SECTION C		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree
1	I get more information when reading my friends' postings.	42.1	55.8	2.1
2	I read related articles to support my points in the blogs discussion.	40.0	55.8	4.2
3	Blogging encourages me to read more in English.	32.6	58.9	8.4
4	Reading comments given by my friends help me to think critically on the topic discussed.	38.9	57.9	3.2
6	I think my reading skills have improved when blogging.	24.2	66.3	9.5
7	I learn how to select information from my readings for the blogs discussion.	24.2	69.5	6.3

D. Students' Responses toward Blogging and Learning Grammar and Vocabulary

As illustrated by the data in Table 4 below, blogging appeared to have provided the students with the opportunity to learn grammar and develop vocabulary independently. A considerable number of them (83.2%) strongly agreed that they had learnt and improved their L2 grammar while 93.7% of them perceived that they had acquired new vocabulary when reading their friends' blog postings (D8). Likewise, 83.2% of them generally agreed that their skill in guessing words meanings had improved through blogging (D6), and 76.5% thought that they were able to use different word forms in English (D2).

Table 4: Students' responses toward blogging, grammar and vocabulary

	SECTION D	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	In general I feel that my English grammar has somewhat improved.	15.8	67.4	16.6	-
2	I can use the different word forms in English (e.g. tenses: eat, ate, eaten)	15.8	61.11	23.2	
5	I am more active in checking up meaning of difficult words in the dictionary when blogging.	20.0	56.8	23.0	-
6	My skill in guessing word meanings has improved by blogging.	13.7	69.5	16.8	-
8	I learn more new words when reading my friends' postings.	30.5	63.2	5.3	1.0

E. Students' Responses toward Blogging and Discussion

In terms of carrying out the group discussion through the blogs, the students generally gave positive feedback on this aspect of learning activities. As shown in Table 5, 90.5% of the students agreed that the blogs discussion had encouraged them to learn English (E9) and majority also agreed that they could practise their communication skills in English. A high percentage

(95.8%) indicated that they had learnt how to give their opinions through blogging (E6) and 92.6% felt comfortable expressing their ideas in English. Furthermore, 87.3% agreed that they felt more confident expressing themselves in English through blogging rather than face-to-face in the classroom. In addition, more than ninety percent of the students stated that they had applied the language skills that they learned in the classrooms (E2, 92.6%) and this had somewhat improved their discussion skills in English (E10, 91.6%).

Table 5: Students' responses toward blogging and discussion

	SECTION E	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	I am able to give suggestions freely in the blogs discussion.	27.4	68.4	4.2	-
2	I am able to use the language expressions learnt in the classroom in the blogs discussion	16.8	75.8	6.3	1.1
3	I feel comfortable expressing my opinions in the blogs discussion.	24.2	68.4	7.4	-
6	I learn how to give opinions in the blogs discussion.	31.6	64.2	4.2	-
9	Blogs discussion encourages me to learn English.	38.9	51.6	7.4	2.1
10	Blogs discussion improves my discussion skills in English.	31.6	60.0	6.3	2.1

F. Students' Responses toward Blogging and Critical Thinking

Having the ability to think critically is an important part of learning especially for students at tertiary level. Thus, when engaging with discussion activities in the blogs, the researchers were interested to know if the students were able to think critically on the issues arising. Positively, the data showed that blogging activities made them apply their critical thinking skills when discussing their topic of concern (F2, 95.7%). For majority of the students (93.7%), the blogging

activities had made them realize the importance of being able to think critically when participating in group discussion (F4). Also, they had begun to recognize the fact that thinking critically was important especially when reading academic articles (F5, 96.9%) and when writing in English (F6, 95.8%).

Table 6: Students’ responses toward blogging and critical thinking

SECTION F		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	I think critically on the topic discussed before I post my comments/ideas.	28.4	65.3	6.3	-
2	I am able to use my critical thinking skills when blogging.	16.8	78.9	4.2	-
5	I now realize that thinking skills are important when reading academic articles.	41.1	55.8	3.1	-
6	I now realize that thinking skills are important when writing.	42.1	53.7	4.2	-

DISCUSSION

This action research had quantitatively explored the ESL students’ feedback towards using blog as one of their language learning activities. Generally, the findings in this study had corroborated those in the earlier studies wherein the use of the weblogs or blogs had promoted collaborative learning activities among learners and developed the construction of new knowledge through blogging activities.

Specifically, detailed analysis of the results indicated that the students’ responses were to a larger extent positive, and they generally concurred that they had acquired further knowledge of the target language i.e., the English language. They had managed to develop their own learning through blogging activities such as gaining new information and new vocabulary. They

also agreed that discussion activities through blogging had help them build greater self-confidence in communicating in English as they were able to academically interact with other group members without their lecturers' involvement. Besides that, exchanging information with friends helped them to construct their understanding towards the tasks and had allowed them to contribute to the success of the group's discussion. As underscored by the social constructivism perspectives, learning is an active process and meaningful learning can only take place when students are involved in social activities. In blogging activities, the students' learning was augmented when they were actively involved in the discussion. Additionally, they gained new knowledge when perusing through the relevant reading materials to search for meanings before they could participate effectively in the discussion. They were also able to construct their understanding by utilizing their past knowledge and experience.

Though conducted in a formal context, the blogging activities had created an authentic, flexible and independent learning environment for the learners in this study to experience. While engaging in the blogs discussion, the students had, to a certain extent be accountable of their own learning since they needed to set their learning goals and participate actively in order to achieve the objectives of the learning activities with minimum intervention from their lecturers. In such learning environment, these students were able to apply the appropriate language skills that matched with their needs and abilities. In sum, the students in the present study were able to apply their various L2 skills, built greater self-confidence, developed critical thinking abilities, and used the target language in a novel environment through the blogs.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study have provided further evidence on the usefulness of ICT in the educational setting particularly in the language learning classrooms. In particular, the integration of the weblogs in the ESL classrooms had provided positive support for L2 learning in that this social medium had provided the opportunity for the students to take charge of their own learning in collaborative manner, set their own learning goals, developed new knowledge, improved their language skills, built their self-confidence and provided fresh dimension to life in the classrooms. The use of blogs as classroom application provides avenue for the students to be more independent and autonomous in their learning; a skill which they can apply beyond the classroom. When students are able to engage with the target language more frequently and autonomously, it will give them extra opportunities to acquire the language on their own. Although the implementation of blogs as classroom application would increase the teachers' or educators' "administrative load associated with the nature of the task" (Hourigan & Murray, 2010, p.221), the benefits to be gained are worthy of the time and effort that have to be spent to integrate this technology in the learning environment.

This work was supported by the Strategic Research Fund provided by Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM-PTS-055-2009)

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